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Abstract

Topic: Sleep and Sleep Conditions of NHS workers

Sleeping is one of the fundamental processes for the human body to maintain healthy bodily functions, and it is also important for physical and cognitive functions.

The biological clock is a process where the body knows already when it is time to sleep, then to recover and when it is time to be ready to start. Usually, this process is a natural process and reverting the body clock means people will sleep fewer hours and not get enough rest. The quality of sleep will be affected.

This assignment will explain how much sleep is important for the body and to keep all its functions in a healthy way, especially for NHS workers who often face the consequences of lack of sleep, and it's very easy for them to face burnout.

Lack of sleep and burnout are very common for healthcare staff because they work long shift hours and most of them work night shifts, which affects the sleeping cycle; this phenomenon will increase the risk of feeling stressed, and emotions will be affected too, such as stress and irritability. The result of this phenomenon for the NHS workers is that they are not able to provide the best service possible, and it is easier for them to make a mistake, which can be crucial for the patient's life. As a result of this research, I will show how important it is to

Increase the sleeping hours for the workers.

To conclude, sleep deprivation is a serious and sensitive problem which affects NHS workers and also the patient.

1. Introduction

Sleeping is one of the fundamental processes for keeping the body and cognitive and physical functions working in the healthiest way possible, and giving the body a chance to perform at its best level. This process is fundamental for rest and restarting the body and the brain. Healthy people usually need to sleep 7 hours to recover and restart all the body functions, but it is different for children and babies, who are still growing and developing all the cognitive functions; they need at least 9 hours. It is different for a newborn baby, which needs between 8 hours and 16 hours of sleep.

Adults usually need at least 7 hours of sleep, but it depends much more on the individual's needs, age, health, and personal circumstances, which can be affected by lack of sleep. Some people can sleep for more or fewer hours and be perfect with that. (NHS, 2021)

Bad sleep quality or not sleeping at all can cause long-term consequences for the body's mental health and well-being. The real point that makes the difference is not just sleeping but the quality of sleep, which means the body does not need to just sleep to recover and restart, but needs at least good quality of sleep, and they are

many factors that can impact the quality of sleep such as individual characteristics, which change for every person: mental health, negative habits, good lifestyle and work shift.

Sometimes people can struggle to sleep, and it could be caused by many causes like anxiety, stress or any changes in their routine, for example working the night shift.

Work shifts can be one of the most common, specifically for NHS workers, because of the long hours of the shift in a row.

The body is constantly under pressure and will start the sleep deprivation, which will present the long-term symptoms which will affect the mental health and the physical condition; the person will start to face anxiety, panic attacks and depression.

When people don't look after themselves in the way they are supposed to, their personal health is affected and compromised in a way that is not expected.

For example, work life could be affected in a bad way, especially for doctors and all NHS workers, due to the long shifts they have to do. As a result of this chronic sleep deprivation, all NHS workers, especially doctors and nurses. There are many cases of negligence because of the fact that they don't get enough sleep, which makes it easier to make mistakes.

Sleep deprivation is very common for all NHS workers, especially for doctors, who at the beginning are not conscious of how much it will impact their performance, level of attention and also their mood. (Parry et al., 2018)

It was reported that more than one case of sleep deprivation was impacted. One example was the article, which reported the fact that around 20% of doctors experienced an increase in sleep deprivation after COVID, and 41% of doctors face this phenomenon daily, especially during the week. In 2022, 40 patients sued NHS doctors for negligence, and after all these incidents showed up, the tiredness and the fact that they don't sleep enough impacted the work performance, which then impacts the way they treat and look after the patient.

As a result, sleep deprivation is getting worse for the doctors of the NHS, and it is a serious problem that needs to be considered because it affects the doctors' mental health and well-being, increases the risk of making a mistake, and raises questions about the safety of the patients. (Medical Defence Union,2025)

2. Background

The “cancer” of the NHS in the UK is the fact that all the workers have to do 10 hours shift minimum which include night shift and early morning shift and then the body is naturally confused because this is not the routine the human body must have; This system was made many years ago to ensure the patient assistance for 24 hours in the row but this affect the workers a lot especially their sleep condition.

Usually, the normal human body is designed to work during the day and sleep during the night to replenish energy and the body's functions. This process is normally called the biological clock, but the real name of it is circadian timing because the body looks like it already knows when it is nighttime, when it is time to sleep and when it's daytime, it's normal to be awake and do activities; breaking this natural clock for the body means disturbing or actually breaking the natural routine. This makes difficulties for the body to get proper rest.

Important parts of this process are hormones and neurological signals, which send signals to the brain. This is the organ used to regulate the light-dark cycle.

As an answer to this, the body does not get good rest, good quality of sleep, and it will be more difficult to do the normal activities the day after because the body does not have all the energy. (Tankelevitch and Bunn, 2020)

Inverting the biological problem for many years will lead to poor health conditions and will make it easier to contract any disease, such as cardiovascular problems, obesity, diabetes, and mental health issues. The highlight of “Sleep and circadian rhythm actigraphy measures, mood instability and impulsivity” is the connection between the biological clock and the psychological system. As a result, the connection between the biological clock and the psychological system shows how much it is related to the fact that humans with bad day/night routines are more likely to feel irritated, sensitive or

irritable with their mood. All these characteristics are related to burnout because when workers have more problems managing their emotions, don't sleep enough and do many night shifts, it is normal if their clock system changes; therefore, emotions are affected, then they can face burnout more easily.

(<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk>, 2025)

A part of the body dies; this phenomenon can affect mental health as well, with stress, anxiety, and it is very common amongst NHS workers facing burnout at least once in their career.

Burnout happens most of the time when a person is under too much stress, doesn't sleep enough, and becomes more irritable and more sensitive. Especially the staff facing this problem become slower to make important decisions.

Burnout is a phenomenon usually experienced by NHS workers because they are constantly working under pressure, too many hours of work, not enough breaks or even time to rest, and they always do the same routine; the fact that they always work on night shift does not help this phenomenon, but makes it worse. At the end of it, after all these factors and adding the fact that NHS workers don't sleep enough, this will increase the fact that the body will be more sensitive to being exposed to physical and emotional stress problems.

This process will affect the capacity to keep the focus and also the capacity to make the right decision at the right time, and will also increase the chance of making a mistake. (NHS Employers, 2025)

Burnout is a big problem at the moment, which touches all the sanitary systems in the UK. This is because of the pressure of consistency the job requires, the amount of the job, the short staff, and the very long hour shifts, which makes it worse to survive for doctors and nurses.

It looks like they are in survival mode all the time because they are pushed to the limit in a lot of situations, and they are required to do so much, and they are expected to succeed in everything they do, at all times.

The highlight of this article helps us understand where the real problem has to be solved, but instead, the blame gets put on the NHS workers. We should blame the system, and say the support for the workers is less than minimum, and as a result, burnout appears, and a lot of people prefer to quit.

This article speaks about all the difficulties the staff are facing, like chronic tiredness and the sensation of always feeling never energised or good enough for the job; most of the staff feel empty or with no energy left or on the verge of burnout.

The solution in this article is to make a few changes to the system to provide better service and more staff to hire: more staff to hire, then fewer hours per shift to do, less paperwork, leadership more empathetic, and understanding, and one thing that can really make a difference is if we put the well being of the workers first because if the staff is mentally stable and do not feel drain then they can provide a better service for the patients and don't face burnout.

On top of health problems, when the body does not sleep enough, the cognitive system will be compromised, reducing the capacity to keep focus, be less awake and conscious when having to make decisions, and greatly affecting the chance to make a mistake. This last point is crucial for NHS staff because they are required to make decisions in a very short time, which is important for the patient, and a little mistake can affect the patient for the rest of their life. All these factors will affect both the care of the patient and the mental well-being of the workers.“ See if u need something, talking about this includes any UK policies, reports, national strategies, legislation, Acts, services, charities, and organisations relevant to the research topic.

3. Methods

This part is one of the most important because it describes how the research on sleep deprivation can affect NHS workers.

The main purpose of the method is to show the researcher describing the method following the 3 steps: Data collection, Data analysis and Ethical consideration.

All the relevant information was found on Google, Google Scholar and NHS UK.

The scooping case will help to understand which one is the real problem, see the different themes and find the gap and all the problems related.

Data collection, also named the searching strategy of scoping review, is the research of all the information that is fundamental to use the right keywords, such as sleeping,

sleep deprivation, sleep quality, shift work, ‘biological clock’, burnout, patient safety, and ‘medical negligence’.

Only the relevant sources with the NHS and the effect on the NHS worker were included, and the main focus was on the study on the NHS or the healthcare system.

Data analysis means all the information not connected with the topic of this assignment was excluded, and also all the information used for this assignment was organised under the main topic, such as burnout.

Work under stress and related consequences, and patient safety.

Thematic analysis was an important part of this process because it was useful to organise all the similar information and the information they have in common about the topic to understand which one was the right way to address them.

About this analysis, there are two different ways to analyse: the inductive approach, which means all the data are already there and is more flexible; the deductive approach means the themes are already made, and the searcher has to find them.

Ethical consideration means that all the information reported on this assignment includes all the studies that are already published, then verify that no new information is used, and all the sources used are referenced.

4. Results

The selected items were analysed and selected because they were related to a different topic but in a different way. Creating a group called Themes was easier to show the main topic and all the ideas related to sleep and sleep conditions towards NHS workers.

The key themes found included the meaning of sleeping and sleep deprivation for all humans, especially for NHS workers. The consequences for NHS staff, especially for doctors and nurses, include the risk of burnout and how this phenomenon affects NHS workers and all the negligence cases as a consequence. All of this group will provide a clear explanation of the main issue identified, and for each of them, it will Highlight the mistake and the gap in the detail.

Theme 1: Sleeping and sleep deprivation for NHS workers working night shifts.

Theme 2: Health consequences for sleep deprivation.

Theme 3: phenomenon of burnout and how it affects NHS workers.

Theme 4: The impact on work performance and how this impacts patients' safety.

Sleeping is one of the most important processes of the body because it resets and allows the body to recover its physical and cognitive function. Sleeping is important, but it is more important to have good quality sleep to allow the body to properly restart and perform in the best way.

NHS workers have a lot of time to experience sleep deprivation which is a really common phenomenon between doctors and nurses because they have long shifts that could be

between 8 hours to 12 hours with not many breaks and it is very common to have the majority of the shifts as night shifts but then the biological clock of the body will be reverted because the body naturally knows which is the time for sleep and which is the time

to stay awake. As a result of the sleep deprivation or reduced hours of sleeping, the cognitive function will be affected because they are required to make the right decision in a short amount of time, and the humour will be affected because it will be easier for them to lose their temper and feel more irritable.

Also, the body's functions are affected because the body doesn't have enough energy to supply all day. When the normal cycle of sleeping-awake is interrupted, it will be normal to feel tired even if they have just woken up.

Theme 2: Health consequences of sleep deprivation

Sleep deprivation or no sleep at all can affect mental health and physical conditions as well.

Usually, when people don't sleep enough or don't sleep at all, their mental health is affected and also their cognitive condition in the long-term. Physically, this phenomenon can cause a lot of problems, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and increase the risk of any illness because the immune system will be weaker than that of another person with a normal biological clock.

Mental health can also affect their mood, which will make them more irritable, stressed and experience low mood as well as make it more difficult to perform in an efficient way on their duty and in this case, for the normal tasks they need to manage daily.

By the time this problem gets worse and has affected a lot of people, they are finding lots of long-term issues, especially with their mental health.

IIRS – Selected Studies Extracted Data Sheet

Name of student: ...Ana Maria

Bove.....

Topic/review question: Sleep and Sleep Conditions of NHS
workers.....

	Article citation	Aim of the study	Methods, Sample size and characteristics	Summary of main findings
1	Chukwunonso-Ogbu, A. <i>et al.</i> (2025)	To understand the impact of sleep deprivation on the NHS staff.	Clinical audit involving health care staff but is not fully specified.	Sleep deprivation leads to mistakes and has a negative impact on patient safety.
2	Palmer, K.T. <i>et al.</i> (2017)	To investigate how bad quality sleep affects the older worker and the effect on work performance and their health.	Study of UK workers over 50 years old for a long time.	Sleep problems are associated with poor health.
3	Kanki, M. <i>et al.</i> (2023)	To understand how is related blood pressure, sleep and work shift.	Big study using data from many people.	Poor sleep and long work hours increase the risk of hypertension.

Theme 3: phenomenon of burnout and how it affects NHS workers.

Burnout is a common problem for NHS workers as it is a result of long-term stress because NHS workers always work under a lot of pressure, and the fact that they are constantly understaffed forces them to do long shifts, which can cause long-term problems. This problem is connected with the small hours they get for sleep, and that's why it shows in different sources how reverting to the natural biological clock, long shift, night shift and working under pressure can easily cause burnout for NHS workers.

As a long-term effect, this will affect the person's well-being and will increase the risk of burnout.

Theme 4: Impact on work performance and how this impacts patient safety.

Not sleeping at all or sleeping small hours will affect the work performance and will especially affect the patient's safety because if the health care workers are tired, they are not able to focus properly on the patient's safety and provide for all their needs. This will make it hard to keep focus and stay concentrated. They are more likely to be slower and less efficient. Without any good rest this will be easier to make a mistake and put the patient in a dangerous situation without being able to make the right decision. As a long-term effect, this will reduce the chance of looking after the patient properly and then provide the best care possible.

This section of the assignment will present the main fundamentals of the study and which one is the connection between them.

1 Discussion of the funding in relation to the review question

The focus of the study is to identify all the connections between the different articles and research and to notice the similarity, so that we can create a group which is called Themes.

This study identifies key themes such as sleep deprivation, health consequences, burnout and patient safety.

A point they all have in common among all of these studies is sleep deprivation, as it is a very popular phenomenon among NHS workers, and it is caused by long shift hours that are more than 10 hours and night shifts.

Different studies show how much it is important to have a regular sleeping cycle for the body to keep all the cognitive, physical and emotional functions healthy(N HS,2021)

On top of this, different studies show the lack of sleep and how it can increase the case to facing burnoutrk performances and increase the risk of making a mistake, which can cost a patient's life.

Much research also confirmed that shifts and working under pressure will hurt the patient's safety (Chukwunonso-Ogbu et al.,2025)

At the end of it, these are the results of all the previous research, and the highlights of all these studies are that sleep deprivation is a serious problem, especially for NHS workers, because their job determines the life of the patient.

2 Importance of the findings for health and social care

As a result of this study coming up, all these concepts are important for the health and social care sector. One of the main concepts is sleep deprivation, which effects the well-being of the NHS workers making them feel tired even if they are sleeping, increases stress levels, and inability to perform the bestthis impacts directly the safety of the patient because when the staff is tired, it ismore likely to make mistakes his phenomenon can increase the pressure on the health care systems and reduce the quality of the service the NHS workers provide. (Chukwunonso-Ogbu at al025)

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So improving the quality of the sleep, reducing the working hours and providing a therapist to check if they are always mentally well or if the staff member is close to face a burnout, can improve the outcome of the result a lot and can provide better safety for the patient.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Sleep deprivation, long shift and night shift is a serious issue must to be considered for NHS workers because long shift and specially night shift impact negatively on the biological clock and as a long term effect will impact the ability to work safely which is dangerous for the patient.

Will be fundamental improve the working condition by reducing the long shift, allow the staff to take more break and the most important which will make the difference is supporting the NHS staff well-being.

Monitoring and improving their mental health and normalise a moment of weakness can really makes the difference because could be the best way to prevent burnout, reduce medical negligence and keep the patients safer.

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